

The PREVENTION CONNECTION

NEWSLETTER

Effective Prevention in Higher Ed

—Jenny Haubenreiser

The prevalence of harm associated with alcohol use among college students is well documented and consistent—across the country and throughout Montana. The most common negative consequences associated with alcohol consumption include impaired driving, sexual and non-sexual violence, depression, academic problems, relationship difficulties, altercations with law enforcement, sleep problems, and suicide. Often the problems are cumulative; students, faculty, staff or parents may not recognize a problem until it becomes acute.

Clinical alcohol dependence (physical or psychological) is not common on college campuses, nor is the use of “serious” drugs such as methamphetamine or heroin. Marijuana is the second most common drug used on campus, followed by illicit use of prescription drugs. Alcohol remains the number one drug of choice and heavy episodic (binge) drinking is associated with the highest levels of personal, social and public harm. Research on the impacts of alcohol on the adolescent brain continues to refine and improve the way we approach prevention.

Research has identified another interesting phenomenon, sometimes called “the college effect,” which shows that college

—Alcohol remains a factor in the leading causes of death among people aged 18–24.

students are more likely to engage in harmful drinking than their non-college peers. This is a reversal from high school, where college-bound high school students tend to drink less. These findings point toward a culture of drinking on college campuses. Additional research has illuminated the types of expectations students bring with them to campus, some of which include the intention to engage in drinking behaviors. This knowledge has been essential in helping us better understand how to talk to students about alcohol use and to determine the most effective prevention strategies.

College students are not a homogeneous population. Habits developed during high school, as well as peer norms, individual propensities, family relationships and protective factors all vary. No one approach will make a measurable impact. The only effective strategy will include multiple approaches, addressing all levels of prevention (primary, secondary and tertiary).

In 2002, the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) issued *A Call to Action: Changing the Culture of Drinking at U.S. Colleges*, which is now considered a scientific standard in college alcohol abuse prevention. This report provides an analysis of available theory and data on program effectiveness, along with

specific recommendations for campus administrators.

NIAAA recommends intervention on three levels: with at-risk individual students; with the entire student body (or significant populations of students); and within the broader community. It ranks strategies in four tiers of effectiveness.

Tier 1 (known to be effective among college students) combines cognitive-behavioral skills and brief motivational enhancement interventions, challenging

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The Vicki Column

"The only way to raise a decent human being is by being one." —Eda J. LeShan

I heard a song on the radio the other day so old it seemed almost new again: *Skip a Rope*, by Henson Cargill, has a refrain that cautions, "Oh, listen to the children while they play . . . Now ain't it kinda funny what the children say . . . Skip a rope." The lyrics go on to talk about marital discord, playing only to win, prejudice, cheating on taxes and ignoring the Golden Rule. It's pretty cynical, pretty simplistic and catchy in a world-weary 1960s sort of way. And yet the song makes an important point.

We've all heard (or trotted out) the conventional wisdoms: *Monkey see, monkey do. Little pitchers have big ears. Practice what you preach.* Or, when we've totally lost patience, *Do as I say, not as I do!*

Parents are children's first and most important teachers, but it isn't what we say that our children will take to heart. Children believe whatever they are living is the norm and that their parents are infallible. Like ducklings, children will naturally follow our lead and work hard to imitate exactly what they see and hear. Yell at the dog, and they'll mimic your tone and posture *exactly* and yell at the dog. You can tell your children to read, but if they never see you with a book in your hand, it's unlikely that they'll become dedicated

readers. It is likely, however, that they will mimic and mime even what you don't want them to. Ultimately, looking at our children can equate with looking in a mirror. I see that every day in my youngest son, who so precisely mimics his father in body language, expression, dress, and tone that sometimes it seems I'm looking at a clone.

Though none of us are perfect, we, as parents, are sowing seeds in very fertile ground. We all lose our tempers, say things we're sorry for, and sometimes we're not as kind as we would like to be. That's human. But as we work through the days, the months and years, we're establishing norms that ride between the peaks and the valleys of behavior. It is these norms rather than isolated incidents that will ultimately, hopefully, influence our children for the rest of their lives.

In closing, I'd just like take the liberty of altering the last refrain of that old Cargill song to what *can* be if we are mindful of living up to our best selves. *Just listen to your children while they play . . . It can make us very proud, what the children say. Skip a rope, skip a rope . . .*

Vicki

Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies and Passenger Safety

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death and injury for most age groups. Firefighters, emergency medical service providers and law enforcement officers are respected community members with a high level of credibility on injury. That puts them in a unique position to help people protect themselves. Workshop participants will gain a better understanding of what happens to passengers during crashes, how seat belts and safety seats manage crash energy and how to best restrain children.

Two-hour trainings for first responders and law enforcement officers will be available statewide throughout 2008. The interactive sessions incorporate the latest

research, crash-test videos, and demonstrations around public education, injury prevention and enforcement.

Patty Carrell, Project Coordinator at Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies (HMHB), reports that they have enlisted Joseph Colella to create and deliver the accredited trainings to Montana communities.

Trainings are accredited through Montana State Board of Medical Examiners and Montana Law Enforcement Academy. For more information or to schedule a free training in your community, contact Patty Carrell at 406.449.8611 or pcarrell-hmhb@qwest.net. More information is also available at www.hmhb-mt.org/.

Effective Prevention

Continued from cover

students' expectancies around alcohol and other drugs.

Tier 2 (known to be effective among the general population) includes environmental strategies such as minimum drinking laws, increased pricing, reduced access and limiting advertisements.

Tier 3 (strategies with partial research or those indicating theoretical promise for college students) applies environmental strategies specifically to a college campus, and includes such strategies as social norms campaigns, and safe-ride home programs.

Tier 4 (strategies are not showing evidence of effectiveness among college students) and include education used alone.

The body of literature, including the NIAAA report and the National Academy of Sciences and Institute of Medicine report, *Reducing Underage Drinking—A Collective Responsibility*, makes the prescription clear: the most effective means to impact substance abuse on campus include strategies that are evidence-based, comprehensive and collaborative.

Effective strategies also involve a good assessment of what is and is not feasible. Solid research is helpful, but implementation of wish lists will be influenced by many other factors, including support from the top levels of administration. This is crucial, since the support of leadership can help ensure necessary resources while sending the appropriate message to students, faculty, staff and the broader campus community.

Most colleges have prevention professionals dedicated to the health and safety of their students. A Department of Education grant has enabled MSU to increase the number of evidence-based strategies in use. Efforts include programs targeting the broader student population, students at risk of alcohol-related harm, and collaboration with the community. Programs include motivational enhancement, skill building and challenging expectations as well as such environmental strategies as alternative activities on campus, increased enforcement and reduced access to alcohol. Descriptions of some strategies currently in use follow.

BASICS (Brief Alcohol Screenings and Interventions for College Students) is an NIAAA Tier 1 strategy, known to be effective among college students. This is

currently the only strategy scientifically determined to have long-term positive impacts. This program is designed for college students who drink heavily several times a week or who have experienced alcohol-related problems (e.g., an alcohol violation). This can be used one-on-one or adapted to a small group setting. The University of Montana is also utilizing this strategy.

The *MSU MIP Program* started in the Fall of 2005 and works with the county substance abuse/prevention agency and the local court system to provide mandated educational programming for MSU students charged with an MIP (Minor in Possession). This program incorporates the principles of BASICS in group and individual settings.

AlcoholEdu for College, an on-line, interactive program, is mandatory for all incoming first-year students. This program uses principles of motivational enhancement to challenge norms and expectancies while disseminating knowledge to a large numbers of students. Research supports the efficacy of this program when used as part of a comprehensive strategy. Parents are provided with their own version, which provides additional information, including how to best talk to their students about alcohol. Carroll College is also using *AlcoholEdu for College*.

Alcohol-free social and recreational opportunities are developed in collaboration with other campus departments and student groups to promote late night free or low cost social activities. Other campuses using this environmental strategy are UM and MSU-Billings.

The *Community Alcohol Coalition* includes key members of the Bozeman community, including campus staff, local law enforcement, neighborhood representatives and members of the local hospitality industry. Efforts focus on city policies and ordinances that address alcohol use within the local community. Goals include decreasing youth access and increasing tools for use by law enforcement.

I've worked in the field of substance abuse prevention on a college campus for the past 14 years, and find it important and

often intriguing. Prevention goals are interesting from theoretical and sociological standpoints. Effective prevention involves long-term strategic planning, purposeful collaborations, and a comprehensive set of evidence-based interventions.

One of our key assets in substance abuse prevention in higher education is the body of credible research and data that guides our practice. This body of knowledge continues to grow, as does our understanding of its broader applicability. Our greatest opportunities in prevention lie in our ability to work strategically with others, our collective motivation, knowledge and capacity . . . on and off campus. Just as substance abuse impacts all members of the campus community, effective substance abuse prevention is a shared responsibility with a shared payoff.

—Jenny Haubenreiser, Director of Health Promotion at Montana State University. For more information, visit <http://www.montana.edu/health/healthpromo/> or contact Jenny at 406.994.2337 or hoss@montana.edu.

In a year . . .

- 1,700 college students died from alcohol-related injuries
- 97,000 students were victims of alcohol-related sexual assault
- 599,000 students were unintentionally injured under the influence of alcohol
- 25% of college students reported academic consequences due to drinking
- 31% of college students met the criteria for a diagnosis of alcohol abuse; 6% for alcohol dependence

Source: National Institute on Alcohol Abuse & Alcoholism (NIAAA) 2002.

For more information, visit the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism of the National Institutes of Health (NIAAA): www.niaaa.nih.gov/

Notes from the Edge

Mariah's Passing: the True Story

—Jenna McCarthy

—This essay was originally a Halloween story for Mr. Burgman's English class. Instead of making up a story, I decided to tell what happened on the night of October 27, 2007. What you're about to read is an entirely real and accurate account of what happened. I hope this will open your eyes as to why drinking and driving drunk are not okay anymore. —Jenna McCarthy

The story I'm about to tell is scarier than any Halloween story I could make up. On Saturday, October 27, 2007, my little sister Mariah and two best friends, Valarie and Kaitlyn, woke up to a regular day. Little did they know that their lives would change drastically and forever that night.

These beautiful girls have three different personalities but are very much the same in many ways. Mariah . . . the old soul, quiet, deep thinker, good listener, and loyal friend; Valarie . . . the soft spoken, intelligent, caring, and gorgeous one; and Kaitlyn . . . the spunky, happy, excited one with the twinkle in her eye. They were together all day.

They were planning on staying the night at my house and decided to walk their other friends halfway home at about 11:45 P.M. On their way back to my house, they were hit by a drunk driver. I was driving home to make my curfew at 12:00 and saw a truck by the white fence with its passenger headlight cracked and burned out. I thought nothing of it, thinking it was just a little fender bender.

When I got home my mom asked, "Jenna, did you see Mariah and them walking home?"

That's when I started to get a little worried. I went down to my room and my friend Lindsay Kilmer called and asked, "Jenna, is Valarie at your house?"

"I don't think so, why?" I asked.

"Well, someone just called our house and said that Valarie had been involved in an accident and she is hurt," she said.

A feeling of complete and utter fear overtook my entire being. I put on some sweats and my mom's yellow coat and ran upstairs. I told my mom what Lindsay had told me, and we got into our Suburban and drove down to where the truck with the cracked headlight had been. Three ambulances and four cop cars had taken its place. People had already surrounded the area with tears rolling down their faces. Right then I felt the tears welling up, but I knew I had to be strong for my mom, who was having a much harder time than I was. The three girls were covered in blankets and surrounded by paramedics and police officers. I couldn't get close enough to see Mariah or Valarie, but on my way back to the car to follow the ambulance, I caught a glimpse of Kaitlyn's face. The twinkle in her eye wasn't there. We followed the ambulance to the emergency room at St. James Hospital and waited for them to call our names so we could see Mariah.

After what seemed like years, the nurse finally let us back to the private waiting room. "When the paramedics reached Mariah, she didn't have a heartbeat," she said.

My heart literally dropped.

"However, they have restored her pulse and she is breathing," she said.

My heart rose. We anxiously waited for the nurse to come back to the waiting room to tell us more news. The next person to come see my family was Dr. Rizer.

"Her pupils are entirely dilated, that's a very ominous sign," he said. My heart dropped . . . again.

The nurse came back out. "There is swelling on her brain, but no neck damage

is apparent. However, we do not have a neurosurgeon on call tonight, so she will need to be life flighted to Missoula so they can reduce the swelling."

They finally let us back to see Mariah. It was so scary seeing her lying there, hooked up to so many tubes; it wasn't her on that table. She wasn't there. It wasn't my baby sister lying there. We rode to Missoula in the early morning around 4 A.M. Someone from St. Pat's had called my dad and said Mariah was going to be okay and that she had all the vital signs needed for survival. My heart rose.

We finally arrived at St. Pat's and they let us in to see Mariah right away. Once again, it wasn't her lying on the table with countless tubes going into her body, possibly keeping her alive. The neurosurgeon took us into a back room. We sat down on an examination bed, awaiting the prognosis.

"She's not going to make it," the doctor said with gloomy eyes.

Tears began flowing down the faces of my family members. She was only fourteen. Things like this aren't supposed to happen to innocent girls. She was my baby sister.

They moved her up to the intensive care unit. When she was stabilized, they let us in to see her, and she looked even worse than before. I rubbed her swollen little hands as tears rolled down my cheeks. My family was in a state of chaos. These things were not supposed to happen. Her organs were to be donated to others in need, but they needed to keep the blood flowing into her body, and so they kept pumping it into an IV in her arm, but the gash in her head was so severe that as the new blood was pumped in, it ended up flowing out of her head. Think about that for Halloween scary.

Looking back on the situation, my mom and I were talking, and she said, "She looked the most beautiful at St. James."

Thinking about it, what my mom had said about her looking the best at St. James was entirely true, and that scared me. She looked the best, but it wasn't her. She wasn't Mariah on that table at St. James. She was a lifeless being waiting to pass on to a different place.

In that one day my life was changed forever and if it's not the scariest feeling in the world to see someone in your family die before their time, I don't know what is.

Here and There

—Dan Haffey

Five years ago, I spent Christmas in Ireland. Many of my relatives still live there. The small town of Ardara, from which my grandfather emigrated in 1910, is located on a point of land looking west to the Atlantic. I spent a day in a small rural school about a half mile from my grandfather's family farm, where two of my young cousins now live. They were in class that day and we talked about my job in America working as a prevention specialist.

I was invited to give talks in two schools in Northwest Donegal. The secondary school was a public school named St. Columbas, the norm in the Republic of Ireland. (Thirty miles to the north, the name would not be allowed.) During my visits to both schools I learned as much from the students as I taught them. Families in Butte and Anaconda (where I live and work) have the same names as many of students I talked to, since many of the miners and railroad workers came from this area of Ireland to Montana.

Ireland was the first country to outlaw smoking in all public places. My cousin Murial and her husband Patty own a pub, and at first they didn't think it would work. Not only has it worked, it has become a public health model for the rest of the world.

Ireland teaches young students that it is irresponsible to use alcohol before they can legally do so. Students can take a pledge to be true to that ideal. They have groups called the *Young Pioneers* who are recognized and rewarded for following that promise into adulthood. Adults in Ireland learned long ago of the problems associated with the abuse of alcohol. I thought it was a fairly new idea until I talked to my grandfather's nephew, Danny, also named for him. He is now about 70 and has been a pioneer since he took this pledge as a teen. He has never used alcohol and he proudly showed me the pin he wears on his suit, which recognizes his 50+ years as a pioneer.

I am currently working with a program in Butte called *Mariah's Challenge*, which is basically the same program. Mariah's

Challenge was inspired by a tragedy last October in which three young girls were walking home and struck by an alleged drunk driver. Mariah McCarthy died from her injuries. Her friends, Valarie Kilmer and Kaitlyn Okrusch, were seriously hurt.

Mariah's father, Leo McCarthy challenged students during his tribute to his daughter at her funeral. His challenge is for high school students to not drink until they reach 21 and for adults to never drink and drive. It was a powerful message that we

are hoping will reach across Montana. Just a few months later and over 2,000 students and adults have accepted

this challenge.

I have learned valuable lessons over the past 20 years in my work as a counselor and prevention specialist. I have seen enough heartache to write volumes on why we need to address the problem of underage and binge drinking. We cannot continue to do little while we lose our children to alcohol. Whether it is children dying in a field in the Mission Valley or a walkway in Butte, we need to come together to take back our state. Every child deserves our help.

In Ireland, communities and schools are proactive in addressing problems relating to generations of alcohol abuse. Wouldn't it be nice if we could all work together to promote a new idea? Mr. McCarthy wants to establish a scholarship program for those who make the right choice. It's time we take a new direction. We can all do better at prevention. Maybe it will just take an angel named Mariah to help us.

—Dan Haffey is the Butte-Silver Bow Health Department Prevention Services Director. He can be reached at 406.497.5073.

Mariah's Challenge

Mariah Daye McCarthy was tragically killed on October 28, 2007, by an underage driver who had been drinking. At the funeral services, Leo McCarthy issued a challenge to the Butte community and especially to Butte's young people. The Challenge, directed towards Mariah's classmates, was: "let's strive to be the first generation of Butte kids not to drink. Let's be the first graduating class without an MIP (minor in possession). Let's prevent drinking and destructive decisions from taking any more of Butte's most valuable asset—its youth."

From this challenge, a grassroots organization was formed:

- *To educate teens about the dangers of drinking and to challenge them to be MIP free*
- *To help educate parents about the dangers and signs of teen alcohol abuse*
- *To foster a culture change in Butte, a city with has a long history of tolerance for alcohol abuse stemming from its early days as a copper mining camp*

*For more information, visit:
www.mariahschallenge.com*

Getting to Yes: *Peter Rosten and the MAPS Project*

—What this program gives students is an opportunity to look at something that's very different than what they have as part of their regular classroom programs. —Linda McCulloch, Superintendent of Public Instruction

After 30 years as an independent motion picture and television writer, producer and director in Los Angeles, Peter Rosten retired to Montana in 2002. At the time, Montana public education was experiencing a series of budget cuts that were increasing every year. One of the outcomes was the loss of arts programs in Ravalli County schools. Rosten was just 53, and had plenty of energy to fill some of the void while giving something back to his new community. In 2004, Rosten founded Media Arts in the Public Schools (MAPS) as a pilot project in Corvallis High School. This academic project offered rural youth

the opportunity to get hands-on, creative experience in the film industry . . . and the skills needed to access living wage jobs. The MAPS mission? *To educate, create jobs and change lives for Montana youth.*

Rosten subscribes to the philosophy that education can be greatly enhanced for young learners through early experience in communication technologies. Montana's Office of Public Instruction agreed and designated MAPS a School-to-Work curriculum, which translates into a combination of traditional educational activities and real world expectations and rewards. Consistent with national and state arts standards for education, the experience culminates with participants creating and producing professional media projects, including public relations and advertising campaigns.

In 2006, Darby High School was added to the MAPS roster of schools, and in 2007, the program expanded to five additional community-based locations (Missoula, Kalispell, Bozeman, Red Lodge and the Wolf Point Indian Reservation) via a partnership with the Montana Alliance of Boys and Girls Clubs.

In 2005, MAPS student filmmakers received their first professional assignment from the Ravalli County DUI Task Force. Other clients soon followed. Client fees began exceeding expenses, and soon MAPS became a profitable business.

The first year's program revenue (2004) was \$15,000 and derived solely from donations. In 2007, MAPS completed its first national advertising campaign. The client, Washington D.C. based *National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators*, ran ads that were created by the 14- to 18-year-old, rural Montana filmmakers in 38 states. By 2007-08 revenues had jumped to \$160,000, an increase derived from fee-based, contract services for a local, statewide and national pool of clients.

It is rare for an academic project to spin off an independent business, but the MAPS project is doing just that. In 2008, the nonprofit's Board of Directors approved a reorganization plan to relocate MAPS from Corvallis High School to a centralized, private facility in Hamilton. Enrollment will be open to students from all six Ravalli County school districts and, for the first time, to adults as well.

The MAPS Media Institute (MMI) will debut in September 2009. There will be a centrally located, brick-and-mortar warehouse with computer labs, camera rooms and a mini-soundstage. MMI will be a tuition-based school/business. While continued donor and client support are anticipated, a significant portion of MMI's revenue will be derived from enrollment.

According to Peter Rosten, the MMI project is based on two of the most valuable lessons he learned through a career in one of the most competitive industries in the world: "It only takes one yes to change your life and it's important never to give up—no matter what."

Rosten says, "In 1984, I acquired the true story of a San Francisco lawyer, Tony Serra. We spent three years developing a script titled *True Believer*. It was my first big studio movie and a very, very hot property. We started offering it to directors in 1987. They started turning us down, one after the other. Suddenly my Hollywood hopes were dying one day at a time. Then my partner on the picture said, '*Peter, it only takes one director to say 'yes' and we'll make our movie.*' From that moment on, I only looked for the yes. We made the movie. It came out in 1989, starring James Woods and Robert Downey, Jr."

Peter Rosten has done a great job in Ravalli County. Last year, his project received the Award of Excellence in the Education Division of the Society for New Communications Research Awards program. The best part? Hundreds of young Montanans have the kind of hope that will keep them from giving up before they can get to yes.



The program's short-term objective is to nurture students and help them develop creative voices, communication ability and confidence through classroom activities and independent study. The long-term goal is teaching skills that can lead to valuable employment.

Foster Youth: *Taking a Step Ahead*

—Statistics show that 70 percent of foster youth across the nation want to attend college, but less than 10 percent achieve that goal. By identifying youth in Montana's foster care system who aspire to college, we hope to make improvement in that area. —Rhonda Safford

Poised to age out of Montana's foster care system, 17-year-old Amanda Hogan of Bozeman had big dreams for her future, but no solid plan for making them a reality. After attending Student Assistance Foundation's (SAF) *A Step Ahead* college preparatory camp, she says she has a place to begin.

"College is the only real chance you are going to get to have a career," says Amanda Hogan. "Going to college will change your life."

According to Rhonda Safford, foster care advocate for the Montana nonprofit SAF, the concept behind the free camp emerged about four years ago. "We realized these foster care youth were lacking a lot of the things other kids take for granted—basic advice on how to get to college, the tools to help them do well once they get there, and a support network on which they can rely when times get tough," she said. "At *A Step Ahead*, we try to equip them with all of that."

The Step Ahead Program offers foster youth a chance to participate in the most realistic college experience possible, beginning with staying on a college campus. According to Rhonda Safford, many foster youth have never had the opportunity to visit a campus. Holding the camp on a college campus and having campers stay in dorms helps familiarize them with the surroundings. That way, going to college for real won't be as intimidating.

While at the three-day camp, participants receive classroom instruction in areas including basic computer skills, debt management, and how to use the Montana Career Information System (MCIS) to research scholarships, colleges, careers and more. Additionally, they receive detailed information about Foster Youth Education and Training Vouchers (ETV) and learn how to complete the application forms.

Youth in foster care are eligible to receive up to \$5,000 per year for college expenses through the ETV program. It is imperative that they know the funding exists, and how to access it to help pay for education. Campers also leave *A Step Ahead* with a free laptop computer to use as they work toward their higher education goals.

Between classes, campers participate in a variety of team-building exercises and leisure activities designed to bring them closer to the other participants, and to give them ideas of low-cost, safe, and fun recreational opportunities for college students. Many who attend the camp stay in touch with the friends they make there. This is an important opportunity to form connections with others who have similar life experiences.

"We know we're making a difference in these youths' lives," Rhonda Safford says. "We see it in the statistics, but more importantly, we see it in their faces and attitudes when they leave the camp."

For more information, visit www.SmartAboutCollege.org or contact Rhonda Safford at 406.495.7750.

"I would like to encourage other kids to come to the camp and take it seriously. Don't make excuses—just make a better life for yourself. Look at your life 30 years from now and the difference having an education will make." —Amanda Hogan



Amanda Hogan

Currently, the Montana foster care system serves about 2,000 youth.

Those who attend *A Step Ahead* college preparatory camp are selected through an application process. To ensure that attendees get the most out of their camp experience, SAF limits the maximum number of campers to 25. Sixty percent of those who attend *A Step Ahead* make successful transitions to college. This is significantly higher than the national average.

In order to qualify for the camp, applicants must:

— be in state or tribal foster care custody or have recently aged out of the foster care system.

— have identified aspirations to attain postsecondary education as part of their Transitional Living Plans.

Creating Healthier Communities

—David Young

—Poverty is more than just lack of financial resources. Poverty is the extent to which an individual does without resources. —Dr. Ruby Payne

What is a Healthy Community?

In 2001, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, as part of the national health agenda *Healthy People 2010*, produced *Healthy People in Healthy Communities*, a planning guide defining a healthy community as one that provides the elements people need to maintain a high quality of life and productivity, and which include four basic indicators. A healthy community:

1. offers access to health care services that focus on both treatment and prevention for all members of the community;
2. is safe;
3. has roads, schools, playgrounds and other services to meet the needs of the people in that community; and
4. has a healthy and safe environment.

<http://www.healthypeople.gov/Publications/HealthyCommunities2001/default.htm>

Dr. Ruby Payne, in her book, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, defines poverty as “the extent to which an individual does without resources” and further defines resources as any or all of the following: financial, emotional, mental, spiritual, physical, support systems, relationships/role models, and the knowledge of hidden rules of social class. Dr. Payne also identifies and characterizes two major types of poverty: generational and situational. Generational poverty is doing without resources for at least two generations. Situational poverty is lack of resources associated with a particular untoward event, such as, a death of family member, illness or divorce. Overall, Dr. Payne’s writings provide great insight into the impact of poverty on quality of life in our schools and communities.

Studies show that rural poverty is frequently associated with poor individual health, unhealthy behaviors, disintegration of the family unit, depression and premature death from accidents, violence, substance abuse and suicide. Because early childhood experiences impact health and well-being throughout life, supportive environments, conditions and healthy resources for school children are critical (e.g., parks, playgrounds, safety, nutritional meals at school, fresh produce at local stores). Socioeconomic advantage or disadvantage is linked to health; favorable opportunities or insurmountable obstacles accumulate over a lifetime and across generations. Research sociologists are focusing on communities because changes at this level foster and sustain individual behavioral change, improve overall quality of life and increase economic productivity—all essentials for creating healthier, safer, thriving, resilient communities.

Fortunately, rural Montana communities are not alone in their battles. The Extension Service, headquartered at Montana State University-Bozeman (MSU), has a presence in each county and is dedicated to improving the quality of people’s lives and strengthening social, economic and environmental well-being.

Early in 2008, the MSU Extension Service added the *Community Resources Program* to its website. The program is designed to provide information, education, resources, technical assistance and services that improve the overall quality of people’s lives and help create healthier Montana communities. A major activity of the Community Resources Program involves providing assistance with developing and securing public and private funds, primarily from grants. The new weblink provides information on grant writing and maintains an ongoing and up-to-date list of grant opportunities. The primary focus of the grant opportunities list is on community-friendly grants; i.e., grants that community-based organizations and special interest groups in underserved, rural communities have a reasonable chance of competing for. In addition, the weblink offers toolkits and guides, news items and reports/publications along with other resource materials. In essence, the Community Resources Program fosters and encourages the community renewal and transformation that results in healthier communities.

Creating and sustaining healthier Montana communities requires a cooperative effort. Fortunately, community-based cooperation is a common thread woven throughout the historical fabric of rural Montana. From the earliest settlements, the formation of community-based rural cooperatives helped maximize resources, solve common problems and provide services. It is time to revisit that sense of community and cooperative effort to create and sustain healthier schools and communities.

—David Young is a Community Resource Specialist with the MSU Extension Service and a Research Professor with the MSU College of Nursing. He can be reached by e-mail at dyoung@montana.edu or by phone at (406) 994-5552.

For more information, visit the MSU Extension Service’s Community Resource Program at: <http://extn.msu.montana.edu/CommRes/index.html>.

Investments in Early Childhood

About 66% (68,400) of Montana's children between birth and age eight have parents in the workforce and need regular daycare. Historically, mothers or the extended family took care of young children during the workday. Today, while parents remain children's first and most important teachers, the majority of Montana's parents rely on other adults to care for and educate their children during part of the day. The result is a rapidly growing industry with businesses in every Montana community.

A new report, *Investments in Early Childhood*, describes the economic effects of the early care and education industry on Montana. This industry encompasses a wide range of programs that offer care and education to children between birth and age eight outside the traditional public school (K-12) system. Programs include infant/toddler centers, public and private preschools, family child care homes, Head Start, after-school programs, and care provided by family members, friends or neighbors where formal payments are made.

Demand for early care and education services relies on four interrelated factors affecting parental decisions to use regulated early care and education for their children: need; quality; affordability and supply.

Children between the ages of birth and eight represent 11 percent of Montana's population; children between ages 9 and 12 represent an additional 5 percent. Approximately 62 percent of women in Montana participate in the labor force. These high labor force participation rates among parents indicate a clear need for early care and education.

The availability and quality of early care and education hinge on two key factors: qualified, nurturing caregivers and a healthy, safe environment designed to help children learn effectively.

The provision of quality early care and education is a function of several interrelated factors including caregiver qualifications and experience, affordability, leadership, business management, parent relations, and the physical plant in which the program is provided. Quality early care and education should also offer a high staff-to-child ratio. The services must also be designed to meet the educational needs of

children at particular ages and developmental stages.

In 2001, Montana became one of the first states to implement a quality rating system. While most of Montana's child care facilities are in compliance with state regulations, some offer higher quality programs that encourage social, creative and cognitive development. Montana's Star Quality Rating System identifies two levels of early care and education quality that transcend registration and licensure. The quality rating system improves quality of care for children; provides parents with identifiable standards of quality; encourages childcare providers to increase their levels of quality; and rewards quality care with higher compensation from the state.

Market rates for early care and education programs in comparison with a county's median family income offers a picture of the cost burden to families. Overall, given a state median income of \$38,503, care for an infant and a child in a licensed child care center would require more than one third of the total family income.

While early care and education is a considerable expense for all families, it is particularly difficult for low-income families. In a study of long-term employment after welfare, researchers found that two factors determined a working mother's ability to sustain employment after leaving welfare: job quality and the availability of early care and education. Women with access to safe and affordable center-based early care and education and with access to quality jobs (positions with higher wages and affordable health insurance) were more likely to be stably employed two years after leaving welfare.

Location, hours of operation and transitions between part-day programs all affect parents' ability to use formal early care and education. Those required to work non-traditional hours or who have long commutes may not have the option of licensed and registered early care and education, because it isn't available when they need it.

There are nearly 1,200 registered and licensed early care and education programs in Montana. Together, they have slots for nearly 20,000 children at any one time. Additionally, there are over 796 in-home providers receiving state funds to care for 1,625 children. This is a sharp contrast to the 68,400 children between birth and age eight who live with a single-working parent or two working parents.

Adequate quality daycare and early childhood education enable Montana's families to work, and help make Montana an attractive place for businesses and skilled workers. These positive results also offer a positive return on investment that makes early care and education a natural economic development strategy.

Source: *Investments in Early Childhood: An Essential Industry . . . The full report is available online at: [ts/economicimpactstudyfinal_001.pdf](http://ts.economicimpactstudyfinal_001.pdf) www.dphhs.mt.gov/hrd/childcare/documents/economicimpactstudyfinal_001.pdf.*

For more information, visit: www.childcare.mt.gov

Average Market Rate for Montana's Early Care and Education Programs		
Type of Program	Annual Cost for Infant Care	Annual Cost for Child Care
Licensed Child Care Center	\$6,915	\$5,875
Group Child Care	\$6,102	\$5,658
Registered Family Child Care Home	\$5,703	\$5,268

The early care and education industry plays a key role in Montana's economy. Every year in Montana, the early care and education industry generates \$143.4 million in gross receipts—the total amount of dollars flowing into the sector in the form of payments for care, including parent fees private and public subsidies. Direct employment for early care and education in Montana is estimated to translate into 6,611 full-time equivalent jobs.

Doing the Write Thing: *The Michael and Leisa Nelson Story*

Michael Nelson never anticipated the influence a poem he wrote last fall for his eighth grade English class would have on his family. The poem, *Mummy Dearest*, vividly recounts interactions with his alcoholic mother and details a home environment fraught with fear and toxic emotional violence. It wasn't written in hope for change.

"I don't know if I would have ever showed my parents because I was really scared," said Michael, 15, of Missoula. "I was afraid my mom would be mad or upset, that she'd have an emotional breakdown or that she'd go back to drinking."

Instead, his poem inspired his mother to change. It became the impetus that prompted her to permanently stop drinking.

When she read the poem, it opened her eyes to the impact of her drinking on Michael. "It made me realize the importance of my sobriety," said Leisa. "I would just turn to drinking instead of dealing with family issues. This made me realize how important it was for me to be a parent, to be a sober parent for these kids."

Although she had been precariously sober for one month when Michael first showed her the poem in late January, it wasn't until she read his words that Leisa made the commitment to quit.

"My immediate reaction was that it was the most beautiful thing I'd ever read," said Leisa. She says she was extremely proud that her son was willing to write down his thoughts and feelings about what he had experienced, particularly in the last three years with her alcoholism. "That he was able to express himself so eloquently . . . for me it was like a little miracle."

For three years, Leisa had neglected the other little miracles her middle child had been contributing to the world around him. Michael will be a freshman this fall, and he's already performed in many plays, enjoys singing, and writes poetry. Leisa was unable to attend his performance as protagonist Alexander Hamilton in the play *In Worlds Unknown* last December because she was too intoxicated to go. That's when she began to realize how acutely her alcoholism was affecting her relationship with her children. Right after that, Leisa began making the transition to sobriety. She hasn't had a drink since New Years Eve. In the meantime, the relationship between the mother and her son has blossomed.

"I'm really proud of her and I'm really happy right now. Everything seems to be falling into place," said Michael. "She's been sober for so long and I feel like I've finally done something to make her proud."

Michael's poem sheds insight on the toll emotional violence can take on developing adolescents.

"I never really had experience with violence," said Michael. "I haven't joined a gang, I'm not involved in drugs, I've never really seen that sort of stuff before. I tried to pick something that would be true to myself and to the rest of the world. I wanted them to know what I have experienced."

Michael is surprised by the emotional response his poem has received.

"It really evolved into something more as I saw the reaction of these people who read it," said Michael. "Mom took it to Alcoholics Anonymous and she said that some of the people there cried when they heard it. I heard that so many people's lives were changing because of my writing and it was just absolutely amazing to hear that, and that was when it started to become something more than just a school assignment."

More than anything, the Nelsons hope their story resonates with others in similar situations and gives them the courage to seek help. As Leisa put it, "The way we feel about it, if Michael's poem changes one person's life, causes one Mom to put down the drink, causes one kid to have a voice, it's worth it."

Mummy Dearest

—Michael Nelson

Bubbly is the champagne
Smooth is the vodka
Bubbly and smooth is mummy dearest
When she stumbles through the door
I'm not disturbed by it anymore
I'm disappointed
Swelling and thriving
Is the anger inside

The two dogs fight
Two blazing movements
My brother is a man lover
Cornered by his father
Threats and words
Not a hand on the flesh
But the vile act is played in their minds
Like a movie at a drive-in theatre

I am a witness at the trial
But I am also the judge
Take a bullet for the wounded
Stand between two armies
And drown
In the hate
You shout
To have them hear
They do not listen
But you have made the difference with your voice

Silence
All is not well
All is dead
The rose
Smooth
The dew bubbly
Smooth and bubbly is mummy dearest
As she stumbles through the door

The Do the Write Thing Challenge

—Listening to the boys and girls read their essays at the Capitol was so powerful. It put the “voice” behind the message against violence.
—Sheryl Burright

Students across Montana were invited by Governor Schweitzer and the Montana Board of Crime Control to answer three questions: *How has violence affected your life? What are the causes of youth violence? and What can you do about youth violence?*

Dozens of students took the challenge and submitted their written work. They sent in essays, poems, stories and songs, and ultimately the work of five boys and five girls was selected. The students were honored at the Capitol Rotunda and had the opportunity to read their work to an audience of Montana’s leaders, parents, teachers and other students. At the celebration banquet, one boy and one girl were selected to represent Montana at *National Do the Write Thing National Recognition Week* in Washington D.C. and to see their work published and placed in the Library of Congress.

Do the Write Thing is a national challenge designed to offer 7th and 8th graders the opportunity to take a positive, creative stance against youth violence. This is the first time Montana has participated. According to Sheryl Burright, project coordinator, many of the students put their own life experiences into words. Some were profoundly touching.

Emily Haggard was one of two National Representatives, and according to a May 5th article in the *Billings Gazette*, it took three rewrites before she felt she’d hit her target. The Reed Point eighth-grader’s essay revealed the violence and discrimination she’d faced in her own life. “*If I remember correctly, I was six years old and I had just moved to a small town in Texas . . .*” she wrote. “*I was the only girl there with light colored skin. You can just imagine, my first day of school I was hoping to find a friend, but my first day was not what I had in mind . . .*”

Michael Nelson was the other National Finalist, and his poem—and what happened as a result of writing it—appears on

page 10 of this issue of the *Prevention Connection*.

Sheryl Burright has been overwhelmed at the response to Michael’s poem. “One poem changed many people’s lives. Not only was Michael’s family changed for the better, but Michael continues to use his new found voice to pay it forward. He is an amazing young man who has discovered that his voice was more powerful than violence.”

Entries were read by a panel selected by the local *Do the Write Thing Committee*, comprised of business, community and municipal leaders. They were considered on the basis of content, originality and responsiveness to the three questions about the effects of violence on the youth’s life. Students were encouraged to describe their feelings, observations and personal experiences—and to offer specific sugges-

tions about what they could do to reduce violence in their homes, schools and neighborhoods.

The Do the Write Thing Challenge by the National Campaign to Stop Violence asks middle-school students to write about how violence affects their lives.

For more information, contact Sheryl Burright at 444-3651 or by e-mail at SBurright@mt.gov.



“If Michael’s poem changes one person’s life, causes one Mom to put down the drink, causes one kid to have a voice, it’s worth it.”

. . . in fact, if parental signature hadn’t been required to submit Michael’s poem for the National Campaign to Stop Violence’s Do the Write Thing Challenge (DtWT), the poem might have gone unseen by his entire family.

VISTA Site Applications

Prevention Resource Center (PRC)
VISTA site applications are due in March
and September of each year. Visit the
PRC website for details:
www.prevention.mt.gov

Storytelling for Empowerment

—Ethan Smith

More than 25 years ago, a lone black family moved to the all-white town of Conrad, and probably had no idea that they'd create a cultural connection that would eventually impact two schools, two communities and two sisters, but impact them they did.

Growing up in Conrad, Julie Berry remembers watching as the community reacted to the black family who'd moved there. While many people were welcoming, some were not, she said.

"One black family moved in—they were *the* black family in a very white community—and it was very revealing about who was open and welcoming to them, and who wasn't," Berry said. "It was a lesson in cultural awareness for me."

That lesson made a long-lasting impression on Berry and her sister, Tonya Wyse. The sisters recently completed the first phase of *Storytelling for Empowerment*, a project that has brought two communities together to focus on their individual histories and on common ground.

Over the past school year, students at Two Eagle River School (TERS) in Pablo, and Broadwater High School (BHS) in Townsend, have been working diligently on videotaped interviews to document the oral history of elders and longtime

members of their respective communities. The result is an oral history of each town that has united two student bodies through a new, but common, bond.

"It's a project that has brought diverse groups of students together, but also the communities themselves," Wyse said. "My main goal was community attachment. Most of the adults in Townsend work in Helena, and are only here on weekends. They don't always have a chance to get involved in the community, and I saw that in the students, too," said Wyse, who directs Townsend's afterschool programs. "This gave the kids a pride in their community that was lacking."

The *Storytelling for Empowerment* grant was provided by the Montana Board of Crime Control, and is funded for another year, so Berry and Wyse plan to make the most of the coming year, too.

That means taking the interviews and putting them on a podcast available online, in a mini-movie format, which will allow more students and adults in both communities to share in the informal history project. The root of the project is what it's all about—documenting and learning from the shared oral histories that came out of the communities.

"We documented the interviews with pictures and video, and our hope is that by sharing these stories, the two groups of students would see the commonalities and realize they aren't that far apart" in terms of shared history and way of life, said Berry, who is the Executive Director of the Flathead Reservation and Lake County Coalition for Kids. "Our focus right now is this podcast

development, using a movie editing program that we trained the kids to use, to put this on the Internet."

In Pablo, TERS students interviewed tribal elders and community leaders with



long ties to the community, including a tribal judge, tribal police chief, and elders in the Salish and Kootenai tribes. Pablo is located in the heart of the Flathead Indian Reservation, and many TERS students come from families with deep ties to the reservation.

The students were assisted by photographer David Spear, who teaches photography at Salish Kootenai College in Pablo. Jill Erickson, who helped implement the grant for the Coalition for Kids, and Jennifer Greene, a creative writing professor at Salish Kootenai College also provided their expertise.

In Townsend, located about 30 miles from Helena, students interviewed farmers, ranchers, loggers and long-time community leaders who have extensive ties to the land BHS students are growing up on. Like their Pablo counterparts, Broadwater students interviewed local leaders who represented a positive presence in the community—another focus of the grant. Townsend students were assisted by teachers Julie Sagissor and Karee Vogl.

"We chose longtime residents who we thought would be good mentors for the students who were interviewing them. We had a list of people to choose from, but we also let the students decide. We tried to guide them to an elder in the community who could have a positive impact on their lives," Wyse said.



Students were given a list of questions so that the interviews would share common themes and perspectives, but students were free to ask other questions. They never knew where the interviews might lead. Some community leaders talked about their service in the Marines during Vietnam, or growing up in a law enforcement family, while others shared their thoughts on the hard work that goes into being a farmer, rancher or logger.

The resulting interviews and photographs were documented in two different "storyboards" featuring quotes and pictures of the elders, which were displayed at the Capitol in Helena earlier this spring. There, Townsend and Pablo students converged for a public display ceremony attended by First Lady Nancy Schweitzer and state education and tribal leaders working for the governor's office.

Perhaps most importantly, the students from two school districts got to meet each other and share their cultures in a fun-filled ceremony characterized by music, history and in the end, a shared cultural bond.

The ceremony opened with a drum circle performance, complete with an informal grand entry parade featuring powwow dancers from the Flathead Reservation. This was followed with a lively performance by Townsend students who were part of the Townsend Junior Fiddlers and Pickers band, and students who performed Irish-style dance routines.

The result was two separate musical scores from the two communities, coming together in one blockbuster performance that highlighted the differences and commonalities between the groups of students.

"The students were really intrigued by that, and they enjoyed it a lot," Wyse said. "The fact that we each got a little bit of the other's culture was really neat. Fiddlers and dancers are pretty active in our community, just as powwow dancers and drummers are a significant cultural part of the Flathead Reservation."

For now, Berry and Wyse will turn their attention to having the students develop the podcasts, and eventually getting them online. Additionally, they want to make the storyboards available to the general public for display in Townsend and on the Flathead Reservation.

"We're hoping to move the displays around, to show them to a lot of people. At

the very least we want to make them available in Pablo, at the tribal complex, and in Townsend," Berry said. "One of our main goals is to create a lasting impression, and we wanted positive engagement between the two cultures. I think we accomplished that with this project."

—Ethan Smith is a Program Officer for the Flathead Reservation and Lake County Coalition for Kids. He can be reached at 406-883-7316 or ethan@frlc-coalitionforkids.org. For more information on the Coalition for Kids, Inc., visit <http://frlc-coalitionforkids.org/>.

The PRC: a Great Resource

The Prevention Resource Center (PRC) publishes the Prevention Connection Newsletter, manages a statewide AmeriCorps VISTA project, sends out a terrific weekly prevention update through its Hot News listserv, manages a resource list that covers every county in the state and more.

www.prevention.mt.gov to learn more.

The Flathead Reservation and Lake County Coalition for Kids, Inc. has actively supported programs that reduce the use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs among families on the Flathead Reservation and in Lake County since 1999. The Coalition continually assesses the needs of the community through forums, data collection, research and evaluation. Information is used to reveal gaps and overlaps in services, as well as unmet needs.

The Coalition meets six times a year. Membership is comprised of Tribal and non-tribal community groups. A common bond and alliance is enhanced by encouraging open communication among the organizations involved. Ultimately, this helps bridge gaps in services and ensures a safe and healthy community.

For more information, visit: <http://frlcccoalitionforkids.org/>



Nearly \$1.4 Million in Economic Development Funds Awarded

An investment of \$10 per person per year in proven community-based disease prevention programs could yield net medical cost savings of more than \$16 billion annually within five years, concludes a report released by the Trust for America's Health. According to the report, implementing programs aimed at lowering rates of diseases related to physical activity, nutrition and smoking could reduce rates of Type 2 diabetes and high blood pressure by 5% within two years; reduce heart disease, kidney disease and stroke by 5% within five years; and reduce some forms of cancer, arthritis and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease by 2.5% within 10 to 20 years. The report also contains state-by-state return on investment analyses for spending \$10 per person per year on prevention.

<http://healthyamericans.org/reports/prevention08/Prevention08.pdf>

The Department of Commerce awarded nearly \$1.4 million in Big Sky Economic Development Trust Fund (BSTF) and Workforce Training Grant (WTG) funds to the GE Commercial Finance project in Billings. GE Commercial Finance, a division of General Electric, will use \$1 million in WTG funds to hire and train 200 new employees over the next two years. Big Sky Economic Development Authority will administer a \$375,000 BSTF grant which the company will use to purchase equipment related to employee training. GE Commercial Finance will provide \$7,900,000 in matching funds. The company will open an Operations Center in Billings in November 2008. All 200 of the jobs created will include benefits. Wages for hourly positions will range from \$16.90 to \$22.10 an hour, while managerial salaries will range from \$58,500 to \$260,000.

"The Workforce Training Grant Program and the Big Sky Economic Development Trust Fund are incredibly valuable programs," said Anthony Preite, Director of the Montana Department of Commerce. "These programs create jobs, generate money for the state general fund and attract millions of new dollars in leveraged funds from companies investing in Montana."

The BSTF program is a state-funded program created by the 2005 Legislature. It is designed to aid in developing good-paying jobs for Montanans and to promote long-term stable economic growth. BSTF provides financial assistance to local governments for economic development projects that create new jobs for Montanans. BSTF also provides funds to economic development organizations in the form of planning grants.

The 60th Montana Legislature increased funding for WTG from \$1.4 million annually to nearly \$4 million. The program is designed to assist established businesses and new businesses in their expansion efforts. It is targeted toward businesses that create at least one net, new job that pays at least the lower of the current county average or the current state average. That wage can include fringe benefits. New employees must work at least thirty-five hours per week year round. Program applicants must demonstrate that at least fifty percent of their sales originate outside of Montana. The maximum funding available to train a single employee is \$5,000.

Since fiscal year 2006, there have been 21 WTG awards. Funding has ranged from \$18,334 to \$1,955,000. Those awards have leveraged more than \$149 million in business investments and created nearly 2,300 well-paid new jobs for Montana workers.

WTG funds are available for fiscal year 2009. Contact Nancy Guccione, at 406-841-2744 or nguccione@mt.gov for program specific questions. Interested applicants can find guidelines and current and country average wage rates on the web at: www.mtfinanceonline.com/WorkForceGrnts.asp

HOT Careers in Montana Requiring Post-Secondary Education

OCCUPATION	EDUCATION REQUIRED	ANNUAL OPENING	MEAN HOURLY WAGE
Registered Nurses	Associate's Degree	423	\$22.99
Automotive Service Technicians & Mechanics	Postsecondary Vocational Training	191	\$14.62
Cosmetologists	Postsecondary Vocational Training	188	\$8.68
Accountants/Auditors	Bachelor's or higher degree	165	\$20.31
Lawyers	Professional Degree	161	\$24.39
Real Estate Sales Agents	Postsecondary Vocational Training	147	\$16.64
Insurance Sales Agents	Bachelor's or higher degree	138	\$13.71
Construction Managers	Bachelor's or higher degree	133	\$24.89
Elementary School Teacher	Bachelor's or higher degree	107	\$35,769*

*Hourly Wage not available. Mean Annual wage has been substituted.

A Different Place: *The Roundup Youth Center*

—Jana Mertens

The Roundup Youth Center, *a Different Place*, opened in March 2005. It was supposed to be a different place for the youth to gather . . . not the city park or the IGA parking lot . . . a safe place where youth could interact with adults who cared, responded and mentored them toward productive, secure lives. Emmanuel Baptist Church is located across the Avenue from the Youth Center building and the people of the congregation have been involved with the youth of Roundup for many years. The Youth Center has become an extension of a very active ministry. Our belief is that you can't influence a student until you begin to know what it means to be in his or her shoes. To do that, there must be a place to meet and to do things together. It's working: we reach 60 to 100 students each week—no small feat when there are just 207 high school students, 106 junior high students and 4,032 people of all ages in Musselshell County.

The Youth Center includes a large open space furnished with couches where people can gather for conversation and a fire in the winter. Games are available to encourage individual and small group interaction and relationship building. The kitchen/dining area is always busy with people playing board games and eating food from the snack bar and drinking coffee from the espresso machine. The snack bar crowd and other groups overflow to the picnic tables and shaded areas outside during summer months. Students can also play lawn games in the grassy back yard, shoot hoops on the basketball court or practice skateboarding.

The Youth Center is not confined to the corner of 6th Avenue and Main. Activities have included Christian rock concerts on the grounds. Groups has gone to the DownPour Festival in Great Falls, on ice skating trips, to the Corn Maze in Billings, and on boatng trips. Classes have been offered (including a babysitting workshop). The Youth Center also hosted and co-sponsored KIDS 101, a full day of workshops, speakers and games designed to highlight the issue of under-age drinking.

People are the heart of the Roundup Youth Center, from the volunteers who give their time Friday nights to the citizens of Roundup who give their dollars. The building is a place to connect, providing a venue and the opportunity for Christian adults to build relationships with young people at critical life stages. Developmentally, teenagers are beginning to question their parents' values and choices, developing their own identities and deciding who they will be. Although teens are particularly vulnerable to peer pressure, they can also be very open to the influence of caring adults. By providing role models trained to mentor young people, we can have a strong positive impact at a critical age. By impacting the teens in our town of Roundup, our circle of influence expands to their families and ultimately affects our entire community.

As stories unfold from the students about their lives at home, at school and in the community, we begin to understand their needs and can direct our actions appropriately.

We have a long way to go, but we are beginning to make an impact for better in lives and families. Our programs are just beginning, but we are here for the long haul. As the students graduate and move on to the world we see the impact our *Different Place* has made in their lives.

—Jana Mertens is the Director of the Roundup Youth Center. She can be reached at 406-323-2817 or ebchurch@midrivers.com.

The latest Census Bureau estimates for Montana counties revealed that 27.9 percent of Musselshell County youth under age 18 were living in poverty (2005). With more than one in four families living on incomes below poverty level, the stress of providing for their children's needs is considerable.

"The Roundup Youth Center is mostly a place to gather but we have awesome things to do too. Basketball court, skateboard ramps, Playstation, air hockey, billiards, foos ball, gutter ball and board games. There are computers and an internet connection. There are espresso drinks, and great snack food at the Snack Bar. The Youth Center also sponsors other events and outings. It is the place to be in Roundup, Montana."

—A member of the Roundup Youth Center: <http://groups.my space.com/roundupyouthcenter>

DARE to Get the Message

—Gerald La Chere

DARE in Lewis & Clark County

The Lewis and Clark County Sheriff's Office implemented the D.A.R.E. program in 1989 with two officers.

Today, the D.A.R.E. division consists of a D.A.R.E. coordinator, two full time and two part time instructors. These officers teach at 22 schools in 9 school districts and graduate approximately 850 students from the program each year. In addition to their regular teaching duties, D.A.R.E. instructors routinely speak to various community groups and organizations about drug awareness and other related topics

The D.A.R.E. core curriculum consists of 17 lessons that teach 5th grade students to identify and resist the pressures to try drugs and alcohol. The program teaches students how violence and violent acts affect the entire community while focusing on choices, consequences and self esteem. D.A.R.E. Instructors offer similar programs to kindergarten through 4th grade. Numerous two-week D.A.R.E. courses are also taught in the high schools which deal with the law, drug education, and anger management. These courses are taught to over 1,000 students each year.

For more information:
www.co.lewis-clark.mt.us/departments/public-safety/sheriff/D.A.R.E..html

In the last issue of the *Prevention Connection* Newsletter (Volume XIII Issue 1), one article made me sure that getting up and going to work every day is worthwhile. *Student Tobacco Use Down*, stated that teen tobacco use in Montana has dropped over 50 percent. That's impressive. The same article mentions school-related programs and suggests that they are playing a large part in changing the smoking habits of Montana youth.

I am the current Helena Police Department D.A.R.E. Officer. I started the position in August 2007 and will be in the program until at least August 2009. I work with Deputy Jason Crum of the Lewis and Clark County Sheriff's Office and I believe our presence in the schools has a dramatic impact in our community.

Currently, we teach the NEW D.A.R.E. curriculum designed by D.A.R.E. America. This curriculum is designed to give kids a hands-on approach to making good decisions. This scenario-based program changes the well-known Drug Abuse Resistance Education acronym into something kids can use every day: the D.A.R.E. Decision Making Model. This acronym stands for *Define Assess Respond Evaluate*, and helps students:

- *Define* the problem so they can start the process of finding a solution;
- *Assess* the choices they have, both good and bad;
- *Respond* by making a confident informed choice; and
- *Evaluate* the decision by examining consequences and conscience.

We help students make informed decisions regarding alcohol, tobacco and marijuana by giving them facts about substances in place of theories or the myths they might hear from other children or teens. The new curriculum is very adaptable and allows for the local area D.A.R.E. Officer to add subjects specific to local concerns. Some of these subjects include bullying, street gangs, prescription drugs and/or methamphetamine abuse.

Three main components hold the program together through the D.A.R.E. triangle: school, law enforcement and parents.

Without the backing and approval of principals and teachers, it would be impossible to convey the message to students. The backing and endorsement of Lewis and Clark County principals and teachers has made a big difference.

Involvement of the law enforcement community is also imperative to the success of the program for two reasons. First, we teach decision-making skills that we hope will eventually translate to lower crime rates. Second, the D.A.R.E. Program Officers have the opportunity to build rapport with students who are making good (or bad) decisions as they get older. I have seen past D.A.R.E. officers connect with some of their former students at times the youth would not even acknowledge that other officers were present.

The parents' side of the triangle is, in my opinion, the most important. Without the backing of parents, students will not retain the information provided.

In 1988, the D.A.R.E. Program started in Los Angeles County, California. The fifth grade students at the time were asked who made the most impact in their lives. The majority stated that it was their parents. This has not changed. In Helena, we try to send parent information slips home along with homework for the child and parents to do together. D.A.R.E. America is also initiating a parent D.A.R.E. program to get them even more involved. This is a section of our program that I look forward to seeing grow.

The D.A.R.E. program is just one tool the law enforcement community uses to fight alcohol and drug abuse. Teaching the children in our area ways to make better decisions and giving them the confidence and knowledge to say *no* to drugs and alcohol makes my job rewarding.

—Officer Gerald La Chere is a member of the Helena Police Department, D.A.R.E. Officer and C.I.T. Officer. For further information about the local D.A.R.E. Program, call 447-8238 or visit www.ci.helena.mt.us/departments/police-department/patrol-division/dare.html.

Honey Berry or Grape?

—Cheri Seed

The average 14-year-old has been exposed to more than \$20 billion in tobacco advertising and promotions. Because tobacco industry marketing aggressively targets youth, schools have been working to teach students to be media literate. Basically, this means teaching students that marketers don't want them to think about the products in commercials or what they see or read. Instead, they want youth to react to images, characters, symbolism and sounds that are likely to influence an impulse purchase.

Students are having fun with what they've learned. In Great Falls, elementary students participated in a poster contest and winning entries are displayed on community billboards throughout town. Ronan students have designed native art-work and prevention messages that were painted on the school picnic tables in an area where kids congregate daily. Butte and Libby students have created unique bench ads and public service announcements to increase community awareness. In Helena, the school district has expanded its media literacy curriculum to all grades and hosts an annual community festival to showcase student-produced media.

Additional school-based activities among grantees include:

- Conducting school surveys to assess tobacco attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of youth; and *Sacred Use of Tobacco* training workshops;
- Coordinating student participation in the MTUPP statewide reACT! Against Corporate Tobacco youth empowerment movement; and Tobacco Days of Action campaigns with school/community events;
- Providing classroom presentations and student assemblies with national speakers; tobacco prevention education curricula; linkages to cessation services for students and staff who want to quit; and peer education training, advocacy, and mentoring opportunities.

The Office of Public Instruction (OPI) has also been working with state and local partners to disseminate information about the tobacco industry's new tactics in



Ronan students created picnic-table art.

promoting candy-flavored and fruit-flavored tobacco products. Flavors such as Honey Berry, Peach, Grape, Chocolate Mint and Raspberry are added to tobacco as a strategy to ameliorate harsh reactions to stronger products. In the words of Big Tobacco, "Growing interest in new flavor sensations (i.e. soft drinks, snack foods) among younger adult consumers may indicate new opportunities for enhanced flavored tobacco products." (Lorillard, 1993)

In recent years, to gain credibility and to attain an aura of legitimacy, Big Tobacco has built alliances and created financial relationships with reputable youth groups including 4-H, Boys and Girls Clubs, Big Brothers and Sisters, YMCA, and Junior Achievement. The tobacco industry has also developed "youth smoking prevention" programs sent directly to schools at no cost. These programs often fail to mention that nicotine is addictive and may actually *promote* smoking by framing tobacco use as an adult choice.

OPI is working in coordination with schools to create awareness of these marketing tactics. OPI also offers assistance in the development of comprehensive policy to prevent third party relationships that undermine school health objectives.

Since 2006, nearly \$750,000 has been distributed to 25 of Montana's rural, urban, and tribal school districts and more than 120 schools through competitive grants under the *School Tobacco Use Prevention and Education* (TUPE) program. The purpose is to expand and strengthen local school programs, and to implement, maintain and enhance tobacco prevention projects in coordination with the Montana Tobacco Use Prevention Program (MTUPP). The program is managed by the Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI) in coordination with the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services.

If you would like more information about OPI's TUPE program, please contact Cheri Seed, Tobacco Prevention Specialist, at (406) 444-0785 or cseed@mt.gov.

Housing Montana

—Patti Webster

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ontana NAHRO (National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials) represents the state's Public Housing Authorities (PHAs). There are several forms of assisted housing, but for the purpose of this article, I will speak only to Public Housing and Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Tenant Based Assistance.

The Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program has successfully served millions of low-income families nationwide for more than 30 years, and has become a key part of federal efforts to address an ongoing national housing crisis through the private housing market. The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) has given the HCV program the highest rating of all the programs run by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

This program has long been referred to as the perfect public/private partnership. Housing Authorities administer funds received from HUD to provide rental assistance for families. Most families pay between 30 and 40 percent of their monthly adjusted income for rent; the Housing Authority pays the remaining portion directly to the landlord. This is not an open-ended amount. The gross rent (contract rent plus utility allowance) must meet income restrictions so that participants do not pay more than 40 percent of their adjusted monthly income at lease up. The family chooses the unit, and the rent must be reasonable based upon the type of unit, size, census tract location and the year it was built.

Public Housing is one of the only housing programs that administers and maintains the state's permanent affordable housing stock. Montana has 2,046 units of public housing owned and operated by nine Public Housing Authorities throughout the state. Under this program, families pay either an income-based rent of 30 percent of their monthly adjusted income or a flat rate rent determined by the unit and the local market. Each housing authority maintains its own waiting list for local units and receives funding directly from HUD in the form of an operating subsidy to administer and maintain the units.

Montana Housing Authorities traditionally have been recognized as "high performers" in terms of administering both Public Housing and Section 8 programs. Recent trends have included decreases in operating funds for this program, and cuts in operating funds have impacted Montana's housing authorities in many negative ways. There is a statewide decline in agency capacity evidenced by assessment scores assigned by the Public Housing Assessment System (PHAS) utilized by HUD.

Montana housing authorities are being forced to do more with less and the result is catastrophic: due to funding cuts and new regulations, the number of high performers within the public housing program has gone from 95 percent of housing authorities to 38 percent. This can be correlated with a decrease of \$1,114,127 in operating subsidies for Montana's public housing programs. Operating on a slim budget with 100 percent of the operating subsidy is difficult at best, but Montana's agencies are currently functioning on just 83 percent of the operating subsidy for the public housing programs.

According to information from the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO), recent federal action has altered the fundamental arrangement between the federal government and those administering the voucher program that the present structure of the program is based upon. Under the currently authorized program structure, the federal government makes up the difference between what it actually costs a family to rent a modest home on the private market and what the family can afford to pay toward rent, as defined by statute. Unfortunately, the conversion towards a capped or "budget based" funding system set in motion through the appropriations process in Fiscal Years 2004 and 2005 altered the federal government's contribution toward family rents.

This funding system leaves Public Housing Authorities with families in need on their waiting lists and money on the table that cannot be used. For example, a PHA might have the authority to lease 500 units through the Housing Choice Voucher Program. HUD funds the agency with the

The Need for Public and Assisted Housing

— Currently more than 2,800 Montana families are waiting to be placed in a Public Housing Authority unit. Approximately 70 percent are the poorest of the poor, with gross household incomes at or below 30 percent of the Area Median Income (AMI) for the community in which they live. Among those waiting, 225 families are elderly and 536 are disabled.

— The waiting lists of for Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers is even greater. Currently, more than 7,400 Montana families are waiting for Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher assistance. Approximately 78 percent of those families have gross household incomes at or below 30 percent of the AMI in their communities; 556 families are elderly and over 1,900 are disabled.

average Per Unit Cost (PUC) from the previous year (\$355) to generate total annual funding of \$2,130,000 for the Housing Choice Voucher Program. Now, consider that due to a low unemployment rate, the PHA is serving more working poor families, thus generating a greater client contribution. In this case, the actual average PUC expenditure might only be \$300. This leaves \$330,000 on the table, but it cannot be used to assist those on the PHA waiting list because the baseline number funded by HUD is already being served. If PHAs were allowed to use the additional \$330,000 to lease a greater number of units, an additional 91 families could be served.

Montana PHAs have practical, hands-on experience in the administration of the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher and Public Housing Programs, and work closely with property owners, lenders, developers, social service agencies and other stakeholders to ensure that the affordable housing needs of the families, seniors and disabled who depend on these programs are met in a responsible, cost-effective manner.

Innovative ideas partnered with public and private funds will be the wave of the future. All Montanans deserve access to decent, safe housing. In order to accomplish this, it will be necessary to make legislative, funding and regulatory changes in

the programs for serving the poorest families of Montana.

—Patti Webster is President of the Montana Chapter of the Mountain Plains Regional Council of NAHRO. Mountain Plains NAHRO is a housing and community development advocate that supports provision of adequate and affordable housing and strong, viable communities for all Americans, particularly those with low to moderate incomes. For more information, visit: www.mpnahro.org/

Social Host Ordinances

—Julie Fischer

Graduation parties, family events, and holidays are all part of the summer social scene for adults and youth alike. What happens when adults allow youth under age 21 to access alcohol at these events? If a Social Host Ordinance is in effect, the adults will be held accountable.

Social Host Laws are a relatively new nationwide strategy to combat underage drinking parties. These laws currently exist as state statute in 24 states and as city ordinances in over 170 communities nationwide. Research has shown that communities that have social host policies tend to change adult tolerance and social norms of underage drinking and thus youth alcohol consumption.

Social host liability laws are becoming more prevalent across the United States. Although Montana state law allows parents to give their children alcohol in non-intoxicating amounts in their homes, social host ordinances allow adults who serve or supply alcohol to individuals under 21 to be held liable if the youth are injured or killed. Likewise, the adults may also be held liable if underage drinkers injure or kill another person. The laws vary in each state, and the adults who ignore social host laws may be charged for medical bills, property damage, and emotional pain and suffering. Adults in Kansas, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Texas may even face criminal prosecution.

The purpose of a social host ordinance is to reduce easy access to alcohol. Family

and friends are the primary sources of alcohol for underage drinkers. According to the 2006 Montana Prevention Needs Assessment, children who are raised in families where the parents are tolerant of their child's use of alcohol are more likely to become alcohol abusers themselves. The 2007 Youth Risk Behavior Survey indicates 15.9% of Montana's high school students drank alcohol that someone else bought for them during the past 30 days.

Parents and guardians can take steps at home to reduce alcohol access to youths under 21. First, be aware of the amount of alcohol in the home, and ensure that alcohol cannot be accessed in the home unless the adult is aware. Next, stress that the minimum legal drinking age is 21 and that there are serious health and safety consequences for underage drinkers. Finally, talk about the legal consequences for the adults who provide alcohol to underage drinkers.

Discuss the issue with other adults in the community to raise the level of awareness regarding the problems and legal issues associated with underage drinking. Parents of teens need to talk to the parents of their children's friends and let them know that it's not okay to serve alcohol to individuals under 21. Engage other community stakeholders, such as members of the school board, principals, teachers, and coaches, and ask them to discourage underage drinking. Finally, establish a local committee or create a coalition and use the media to publicize the efforts targeting underage drinking.

Helena's Social Host Ordinance

On July 7, 2008, Helena became the first city in Montana to pass a social host ordinance. The city commissioners approved the city ordinance in a 4-to-1 vote in an effort to discourage underage drinking.

The ordinance is a municipal civil law that holds hosts accountable if they allow underage persons (other than their own children) to consume alcohol at parties or gatherings on private property. The new ordinance states that a social host is any person who knows or reasonably should know that an underage person is in possession of or is consuming an alcoholic beverage at a gathering on his or her premises. (Excepting MCA 16-6-305) Violators will face a \$300 fine.

For more information, go to <http://www.helena.k12.mt.us/district/youthcon/index.dhtm>.

—Julie Fischer is a Program Specialist for the Montana Board of Crime Control. She can be reached at 406-444-2056 or JFischer2@mt.gov.

College is Possible

—Andrea Rankin

—I've always planned to go to college. With GEAR UP, I've learned what I needed to do in order to make it through.

—A Box Elder High School Junior

In December 2007, Montana GEAR UP surveyed 2007 graduates of 19 GEAR UP high schools to find out their post-high school status and plans. Out of 357 graduates, GEAR UP received information on 339 (95 percent).

— For the third year in a row, the college-going rate among Montana's GEAR UP graduates has remained constant: 65 percent in 2005 and 66 percent in 2006 and 2007 were pursuing postsecondary education.

— Thirty-nine (39) percent enrolled in tribal colleges, 39 percent in the Montana University System, six percent in community colleges, one percent in private colleges, and 14 percent in other/out of state institutions.

— Particular classes, college visits and GEAR UP were cited as the top three experiences that best prepared students for college.

*For more information about the program, visit:
<http://gearup.montana.edu/>.*

Montana's GEAR UP Program is based on the belief that postsecondary education is possible for all Montana students, regardless of economic background. The program strives to empower students so that they can realize that ambition.

In a 2007–2008 school year survey, 92 percent of Montana GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Education) students and 91 percent of their parents believed that the student would go to college. The mission of Montana GEAR UP is to take these aspirations and make them reality by preparing students to succeed in postsecondary education.

Montana GEAR UP works with 25 middle schools and their receiving high schools. GEAR UP schools are in low-income, rural communities and serve students who are educationally at risk. Two-thirds of participating schools are located

on or near Indian reservations. The program serves an entire cohort (grade) of students beginning in the seventh grade and follows the class through high school, adding another cohort of seventh grade students every year of the grant. Three goals provide the framework for delivering services: early college and career awareness; financial aid awareness, planning, and scholarships; and improved academic support and rigor.

There is no one-size-fits-all solution, so GEAR UP coordinates with each school using an individualized implementation plan to accommodate varying educational and cultural needs. Montana GEAR UP uses regional networks, statewide partnerships, and professional development to carry out the goals and objectives of the program. Specific services include: bolstering academic enrichment and support; academic grants and scholarships for postsecondary educa-

tion; summer programs on college campuses; fostering parental involvement; improving technology in the classroom; supporting professional development for educators; and providing career, college, and financial aid awareness and resources.

In addition to providing students with a rigorous curriculum and academic support, the impact educators can have on student aspirations cannot be overstated. Teachers' expectations of students are strongly correlated with academic performance. GEAR UP students who said that their teachers expected them to go to college had a mean GPA of 2.78 compared to the mean GPA of 2.09 for students who said their teachers did not expect them to go to college. Educators are also a tremendous

resource for promoting a college-going culture. The Montana GEAR UP 2007–2008 educator survey queried educators about the experiences that would help students im-

prove their chances of attending and succeeding in postsecondary education. Tutoring, college visits, and study skills classes were cited as the top three experiences for students in grades 7 through 12.

A disparity between students/parents and teacher expectations exists. While the postsecondary expectations of students and parents fall above the 90th percentile, educators' expectations for their students fall above the 70th percentile. Boosting educators' expectations remains a goal and a challenge. These findings can be used as a catalyst to begin a dialog among educators and to examine the relationship between teacher expectations and student performance.

Montana GEAR UP evaluations indicate that the higher the educational level a student aspires to, the higher his or her academic performance will be.

Montana GEAR UP is funded by a six-year, \$18 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education, which runs from 2005–2011.

To learn more about college access initiatives, contact Lindsay Thompson at 444-0056 or sthompson@montana.edu.

—Andrea Rankin is a Montana GEAR UP Program Manager. For more information about the program, visit: <http://gearup.montana.edu/>.

"GEAR UP has changed my expectations for college and my future because in the past few years GEAR UP has helped me get ready for college."

—a Montana GEAR UP student

What to Pack

—Casey Kyler-West

This time of year parents are getting their children ready to go back to school, but there's more to getting ready than going on the annual shopping trip for clothes and supplies. With all the changes in the workforce and new opportunities on the horizon, parents and students need to make sure they're ready for what the future holds.

A new publication by Montana's Career Resource Network, *What to Pack*, is tailored to meet the needs of middle school students. The publication is designed to help students start thinking about what interests them and how those interests could lead to a career as they prepare to transition into high school.

What to Pack offers a number of resources, including a side-by-side comparison of high school graduation requirements and entrance requirements for Montana's university system. The purpose is to help middle-school students begin planning the courses they'll take in high school. Most students don't start thinking about college requirements until their junior or senior year, and by then it may be too late to get into the classes needed to enter the college they want.

Money is another topic covered in *What to Pack*. Students can look at how much money they need to afford the kind of lifestyle they want to live. While we all know money isn't everything, the publication offers a budget worksheet that helps students consider common daily living expenses like rent, utilities, car payments, school loans, fixed expenses like cable, food and Internet service, and other expenses that come up. Students can then look at the kind of jobs that would support a given lifestyle.

Once students identify an interesting career, they can find out just how much education they need to become qualified for it. They can

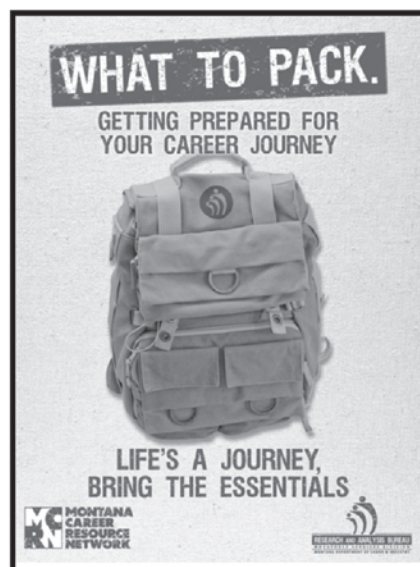
There is a connection between quality education and economic success. The best paying jobs today and in the future require ever-increasing skills and knowledge; we need to help our Montana kids become students for life.

—Governor Brian Schweitzer

also begin to analyze careers in context with their own personalities. *What to Pack* looks at five different personality types: artistic, conventional, enterprising, investigative, realistic and social. Some of the jobs that can make good fits for specific personality types are listed.

What to Pack was produced by the Career Resource Network of the Montana Department of Labor and Industry's Research and Analysis Bureau. To download this and other resources, go to www.ourfactsyourfuture.com. You'll find *What to Pack* in the publications section, under the "Career Publication" heading. For more information, call (406) 444-2430 or toll free at (800) 541-3904.

—Casey Kyler-West is the Communications Director for the Department of Labor and Industry. She can be reached at ckylwest@mt.gov.



More Resources

What to Pack is just one of many resources available for students through the Department of Labor and Industry's Research and Analysis Bureau.

To locate these publications, go to www.ourfactsyourfuture.com and click on the Career Resource Network tab, then MCRN Publications. The listed publications can be downloaded. To order a printed copy of any of the listed publications, call the Research and Analysis Bureau at (406) 444-2430 or toll free at (800) 541-3904, write to us at P.O. Box 1728, Helena, MT 59624-1728 or e-mail us at: webmasterrad@mt.gov.

The opinions expressed herein are not necessarily those of the Prevention Resource Center and the Addictive and Mental Disorders Division of the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services.

The Prevention Resource Center and the Addictive and Mental Disorders Division of the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services attempt to provide reasonable accommodations for anyone with a known disability that may interfere with a person participating in this service. Alternative accessible formats of this document will be provided upon request. For more information, call AMDD at (406) 444-3964 or the Prevention Resource Center at (406) 444-3484.

Fit, Healthy and Ready to Succeed

—We know that kids can't learn as well if they don't eat a healthy diet and exercise regularly. —First Lady, Nancy Schweitzer

Montana's First Lady and mother of three, Nancy Schweitzer, understands that healthy lifestyle habits have a major impact on children's success at school.

"Montana has been a leader in *Recess Before Lunch* programs in schools," says Mrs. Schweitzer. "This is a great policy, since research shows that students tend to make healthier eating decisions if recess comes before lunch. Other schools are serving a smart morning snack like fruit, cheese, and whole grain foods."

Since 2006, when Congress mandated local school wellness policies, many Montana districts have developed impressive programs to enhance the nutrition and fitness of students and staff. For example, schools in Billings, Box Elder, Bozeman, and Lolo received awards in USDA's Healthier US School Challenge. Bozeman and Laurel districts received state Worksite Wellness awards. Missoula and St. Regis serve breakfast in the classroom and communities across the state are creating Farm-to-School coalitions.

When it comes to kids' nutrition and physical activity, though, schools are just one factor. Healthy habits start—and are reinforced—at home. Here are Mrs. Schweitzer's thoughts on simple ways that families can help kids eat smart and get fit:

Try it, you'll like it: Kids don't always know that healthy foods taste good until they try them. Making healthy options fun,

like 'ants on a log' (celery, peanut butter or light cream cheese, and raisins) is another easy way to add nutrition.

Enjoy family meals: Eating dinner is an important time for families to visit and for kids to share what they learned in school. An even better option is to cook the meal together.

Cook and learn: There are lots of ways for families to integrate math and science in the kitchen, like learning how yeast works in baking bread. And a lot of math goes into cooking too, like using measuring cups and doubling a recipe.

Play together: Take a family walk af-

Getting smart foods onto children's plates and into their mouths is easier than we sometimes think. For podcasts about simple steps toward healthier eating, to find out how to get more nutrition for your calories, and to find games, coloring sheets, and helpful family tips, go to www.mpyramid.gov/.

ter supper or in the morning to start your day. Incorporate fun exercise, count how many steps are around your house, measure your stride and multiply.

There are many healthy opportunities for schools and families in the Treasure State. Many Montana schools can buy food locally and fully prepare meals in the school kitchen. "Knowing what is in food and where it comes from can lead to healthy eating. Taking advantage of local and state parks to explore is another way Montana families can insure their children are fit, healthy, and ready to succeed," says Mrs. Schweitzer.

Young children need the right fuel to grow, learn and develop. This means foods and beverages with plenty of nutrients and not too many calories, fats or sugars. When children fill up on the right stuff—high quality nutrition for their bodies and brains—they have less room for nutrient-poor choices (e.g., soft drinks, chips, candy and desserts). Here are some quick, easy ways to serve children high-octane choices from every food group.

Whole grain foods with carbohydrates, fiber, B-vitamins, and more. Since the 2005 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* focused on the nutritional benefits of whole grains, there has been an explosion of new options on grocery shelves. The key is to choose products that list whole grains as the first ingredient or two on the label. There are whole grain cereals for breakfast, the kid-friendly, 'white' whole wheat bread for lunchtime sandwiches, crunchy whole grain crackers for snacks, and delicious whole grain pastas for dinner.

Fruits and veggies with antioxidants, vitamins A and C, potassium, and fiber. You can't go wrong with produce, especially with fresh items from local farms. All types of fruits and veggies count—fresh, frozen, canned, dried, and 100 percent juice—and eating more matters, for kids and adults.

Low-fat dairy with protein, calcium, potassium, magnesium, and phosphorus. The nutrients in this group are important for kids—sadly, most young people in America are not getting enough calcium or potassium. Fortunately, it's easy to get the 3-a-day dairy servings that children and teens need.

Lean meat/poultry/fish/eggs/beans/nuts with protein, iron, zinc, and B-vitamins. For both growing muscles and active brains, these nutrients top the list. Getting enough protein at every meal and snack helps children feel comfortably satisfied after eating. While most kids get plenty of protein foods at lunch and dinner, breakfasts and snacks can be a bit skimpy on protein, but

Source: EAT RIGHT MONTANA, a coalition promoting healthy eating and active lifestyles. Past and current issues of *Eat Right Montana's* monthly nutrition and physical activity recommendations can be downloaded free at www.eatrightmontana.org/eatrighthealthyfamilies.htm.

Strengthening Montana: *Montana's Big Backyard*

—Governor Brian Schweitzer

Some of my best memories are of playing outdoors with my brothers and sisters on the family ranch. We grew up hearing, “*Get outside and play!*” and we did. I remember whole days spent building forts, tracking animals, fishing and helping out around the ranch.

Times have changed. Kids are scheduled from morning until night, and they’re connected through an electric plug a lot of that time. That isn’t to say that technology isn’t important. Access to technology is a critically important tool in the 21st century. What is even more critical, though, is the balance between being plugged in through the world-wide web and being connected to the natural world. Without that, kids miss out some of the best parts of childhood. They also miss out on understanding Montana’s big backyard and all it has to offer.

Montana is home to fewer than seven people per square mile. That means we still have plenty of open spaces . . . a giant natural playground that’s perfect for an active life—from fishing and swimming, to skiing and hiking. There’s something for everyone here. Montana’s natural beauty provides our children a place to learn as well as play. The First Lady and I established our *Math and Science Initiative* to encourage children to discover the wonders of Montana through learning and exploration.

We are also aware that children today have had less contact with the natural world than the generations of children who came before them. Richard Louv, author of *Last Child in the Woods*, coined the term “nature-deficit disorder,” to describe the impacts on health and wellbeing of kids who have become disconnected from nature.

We are excited about the Montana Children and Nature Summit planned by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. The Summit will convene local, state and federal land and recreation resource managers, health care professionals, educators, representatives of non-profit groups and private industry to discuss the importance of reconnecting children with nature in Montana’s big backyard. This is important. Kids who have the opportunity to explore the natural world thrive. They have reduced stress, better concentration and better creative problem solving skills.

We need to ensure that kids for generations to come can connect with nature, so we’re doing our best to encourage kids and families to *get outside and play!*

The Montana Children and Nature Summit will take place September 23, 2008 at the Great Northern Hotel in Helena. For more information, call 406.444.3750 or go to www.mtrpa.info/summit.php.

Active Fun

A study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* showed that 16.3 percent of children ages 2 to 19 are obese and an additional 15.6 percent are overweight (May 2008). Several recent studies also say that childhood obesity is growing faster in rural areas than in cities.

This is a problem for a number of reasons. Extra pounds add up to extra health problems. Overweight and obesity among adults are linked to increased risk of heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure and certain cancers. And overweight children are at high risk of becoming overweight or obese adults.

Regular activity - at least 60 minutes a day - helps children grow strong, stay well, and maintain a healthy weight. Recent research confirms that being physically enhances learning as measured by critical thinking skills, better grade point averages and standardized test scores. Bottom line: getting kids off the couch makes them healthier.

Exploratory play: The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) believes active play is so essential for kids that they published a 10-page paper on getting families to play together. According to AAP, play helps children mentally, physically, socially and emotionally. All you have to do is turn off the TV and go explore . . . the yard, the neighborhood, the playground, or the park. Explore on your feet, on a bike, or in a canoe. Splash in a stream, tumble in the leaves, or do somersaults in the grass.

Organized activities: Active play can be organized by adults or children, indoors or out. There are indoor games such as Simon Says or Twister®, and dozens of outdoor games from hopscotch, jump rope and dodgeball to Frisbee® golf (Folf), badminton and volleyball. Trips to the bowling alley, skating rink or swimming pool can also provide active fun.

Team sports provide opportunities for physical activity - so long as kids actually get to play sports that they enjoy. Sign your children up for sports *they* choose. Different children excel at and enjoy different types of activities; some do not enjoy competitive sports at all. Attend practices regularly to make certain that all children are getting equal chances to play—rather than just sitting on the bench.

Source Cited: EAT RIGHT MONTANA, a coalition promoting healthy eating and active lifestyles. Past and current issues of Eat Right Montana’s monthly nutrition and physical activity recommendations can be downloaded free at www.eatrightmontana.org/eatrightthehealthyfamilies.htm.

The Last Word

—Joan Cassidy, Chemical Dependency Bureau Chief

This issue of the *Prevention Connection* provides information about a number of community-level efforts in play throughout Montana. It's a diverse issue, with strategies that range from learning to create and market media to connecting teens with community elders.

Taking a step back, it's also important to understand effective policy-level strategies. The publication, *10 Drug and Alcohol Policies That Will Save Lives*,* published by Join Together and the Boston University School of Public Health, does a nice job of answering the question, "What actually works to prevent and reduce alcohol and drug problems?" The policies following were developed by national experts and community leaders based on scientific evidence.

The policy recommendations focus on three primary goals: preventing underage

drinking, treating addictions and reducing and preventing crime. They offer good food for thought.

1. Increase alcohol prices through taxes, particularly on beer. The report cites research suggesting that underage drinkers consume as much as 20 percent of all alcohol sold in the US, but will drink less when beer costs more.
2. Limit alcohol advertising and promotional activities that target young people. The alcohol industry targets advertising to youth. Long term exposure increases the likelihood that kids will drink.
3. Adopt laws designed to prevent alcohol-related deaths and injuries among youth. Good examples are graduated drivers' licenses and routine compliance checks.
4. Require and enforce equal insurance coverage (parity) for drug and alcohol treatment.

5. Support the development and use of effective medications for addiction treatment.
6. Make screening for alcohol and drug problems a routine part of primary care and emergency room visits.
7. Give higher payments to providers who get better outcomes.
8. Require effective treatment and continuing, supervised aftercare rather than simple incarceration for non-violent drug and alcohol offenders.
9. Repeal policies that prevent ex-offenders from returning to full participation in society.
10. Support the work of community coalitions.

**10 Drug and Alcohol Policies That Will Save Lives* can be accessed at www.jointogether.org/aboutus/ourpublications/pdf/10policies.pdf.

CSAP Center for
Substance Abuse
Prevention
Substance Abuse and Mental
Health Services Administration

A joint publication of the **Prevention Resource Center**
and the **Addictive and Mental Disorders Division**

MONTANA
Department of Public Health & Human Services

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